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SUBJECT: ROK PRESIDENT LEE DELIVERS NUANCED STATEMENT ON  
THE DPRK

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During his visit to the Unification Ministry on March 26, ROK President Lee Myung-bak made extensive comments on North Korea, especially the importance of denuclearization. Lee stressed that peace and prosperity in North Korea could be achieved only through denuclearization. Highlights of Lee's remarks, provided in full by an Embassy contact, include:

Reunification. Nobody knows when and how the two Koreas will be reunified, but what is clear is that all Koreans, whether from the North or South, want "peaceful and sincere" reunification. South Korean leaders must work toward reunification within a transparent framework of rules and principles; past governments have lacked such a framework. The two Koreas already have the beginnings of such a framework in the Basic Agreement that took effect in 1992.

Denuclearization. The most important component of the Basic Agreement concerns denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea must live up to the Agreement by implementing the agreements reached in the Six Party Talks. While denuclearization is of utmost importance, South Korea also recognizes the need to help relieve the tremendous humanitarian difficulties facing North Koreans.

Economic Assistance. South Korea will and must provide humanitarian assistance to the people of North Korea, whom Lee said that he "loved". But North Koreans too must help in humanitarian issues. They must provide accounting for POWs and those who were kidnapped, as well as accommodating family reunification meetings. Large economic projects, Mt. Kumgang and the Kaesong Industrial Complex, should continue. But, again, North Korea must cooperate, because without the two sides aiming for the same goals, the projects cannot succeed. An unofficial translation of the complete remarks follows.  
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On March 26, President Lee Myung-bak was briefed for two hours by the Ministry of Unification (MOU) on inter-Korean activities and relations. In addition to 31 MOU officials, the briefing was also attended by the Minister of Strategy and Finance, Kang Man-soo, and National Security Advisor Kim Byung-kook. Following an introduction by Minister of Unification Kim Ha-joong, President Lee addressed the MOU officials.

Begin text of remarks.

#### MINISTER OF UNIFICATION KIM HA-JOONG'S INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Ministry of Unification will work in a new way in accordance with the Lee Myung-bak government's vision toward an advanced ROK. At this new juncture, while there has been both pros and cons in the past unification policies, I would first like to look back on what went wrong. The pursuit of national unification must be based on a national consensus and unity. There have been criticisms that the Ministry of Unification did not do enough to resolve ideological conflicts within the ROK or to reach a national consensus on unification. It is also true that at times we aroused concerns from our citizens over South-North relations by failing to listen to their voice and seeing eye to eye with them. I feel deeply responsible. Now I would like to renew our determination and attitude. Improving South-North relations is essential to realizing national stability and economic development, as well as building an advanced, unified Korea. I would like to apply the creative and pragmatic spirit -- an important underpinning of the new government -- to the inter-Korean relations as well. I intend to transform the inter-Korean relations into a forward-looking, productive, and mutually beneficial relationship based on firm principles and a flexible approach. In so doing, I will seek ways to return the inter-Korean relations to where they belong, and pursue stability and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula based on mutual trust. I believe this will lay the groundwork for an advanced, unified Korea. The MOU will do its best to regain the people's support by fully communicating with, and serving them. In so doing, we will do our best for the Lee Myung-bak government to fulfill its role in the history.

#### PRESIDENT LEE'S REMARKS

This occasion of the Ministry of Unification's briefing reminds me of many things. Minister Kim has already commented on the past unification policies. While recognizing the positive aspects of our past efforts toward South-North reconciliation and harmony, we stand at a threshold today, where South-North relations should begin anew in this new year, being upgraded by not just one notch, but even two notches.

We have cried out for unification so many times, for so long. Leaders of both South Korea and North Korea have always cried out for unification. But now we must rethink whether it was a genuine yearning from the bottom of the hearts and minds of the peoples of both the ROK and DPRK, or just a strategic motto for their leaders.

Everyone in South Korea and North Korea wants a true unification. We still have to reach a consensus among the people over the means, method, and timing of unification. We will fully respect the will of the both people in employing policies toward unification. But at this initial stage of the new government, we need to take stock of the many pending issues between South and North, and reaffirm the basic spirit of the inter-Korean relations.

The South-North Basic Agreement was signed in 1991 and took effect in 1992. North Korea still officially acknowledges the Basic Agreement. Of course there is a more recent summit agreement between the South and North. But we must abide by the spirit of the 1991 Basic Agreement, which is the most essential of all. The Basic Agreement touches on the nuclear issue of North Korea and on the Peninsula, which I think is the most important issue between South and North. It is not just South Korea that wants the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has already agreed on the spirit of denuclearization as well. In accordance with the spirit, I hope the nuclear problem will be resolved through the Six-party Talks. The Republic of Korea must continue to endeavor for the nuclear dismantlement of North Korea by actively cooperating along the Six-Party Talks process.

There are a number of South-North issues, including how to proceed with humanitarian assistance, and how to define the South-North relationship until nuclear abandonment. One thing is clear: We should love the North Korean people as we love the South Korean people. In this regard, we will continue with our cooperation to help the North Korean people out of their difficult situation.

But North Korea also has to acknowledge the fact that both South and North are cooperating. As they do so -- although not as a condition -- I think we can cooperate from a humanitarian perspective. Although there might be major problems along the way, I believe the South and North have agreed to hold cautious talks on issues such as prisoners of war, abductees, and the aging of separated families, all from a humanitarian perspective.

The Mt. Kumkang tourism and the Kaesong Industrial Complex are actually the projects that most visibly represent inter-Korean cooperation. Despite their room for improvement in many aspects, I believe that these projects must go on and that the South and the North should work together to continue what needs to be done in order for those projects to be a success. These projects are not just for South Korea. They are mutually beneficial, helping both North Korean and South Korean businesses. In that regard, both sides must cooperate. For a genuine inter-Korean business to take place in earnest, we must admit that many of the inter-Korean issues need to be ironed out.

My government will approach South-North consultations with sincerity and an open mind. This is not something to be worked out unilaterally. Both sides must mutually recognize what needs to be recognized, and work to successfully reconcile differences, promote peace, and realize co-prosperity in both economies.

We cannot expect North Korea to rely on help from others forever. As a single ethnic nation, we must help North Korea stand on its own feet economically as soon as possible. I believe North Korea has the capability. We are keeping our eyes on the resolution of North Korea nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks. We must also make efforts ourselves. The North Korean leadership should realize that resolving the nuclear problem will benefit the DPRK, because: 1) the nuclear issue causes many problems on the Peninsula; 2) we cannot unify with a nuclear-North Korea; and 3) it makes full-fledged economic cooperation difficult. Once it gives up its nuclear ambitions, North Korea will stabilize, peace will be maintained, its economy will prosper, and it will lay the groundwork for economic self-reliance. We are always ready to cooperate, once the North Korea issues are resolved through close cooperation with the international community. This problem also needs South-North cooperation at an appropriate time. I think we need to coordinate the timing of our consultations.

Against this background, there will not be any South-North negotiations against the will of the people anymore. We will be actively ready for South-North dialogue on any issue, based on transparent, internationally recognized rules. In light of this, Ministry of Unification officials will need to change their attitude toward negotiation. You should be guided by the spirit of genuinely helping North Korea, reviving its economy, and allowing its people at least the minimum level of basic rights to pursue happiness. Under the spirit, the South and North should negotiate while mutually taking balanced steps. Once the April 9 National Assembly election is over and inter-Korean negotiations begin in various areas, I believe there will be a chance for us to seriously discuss the new government's perspectives on unification and ways to address a number of North Korean issues.

The new government aims at making Korea an advanced, world-class nation. In this process, I hope North Korea would also have a chance to join in and develop. I would

rather seek a way for both Koreas to prosper together, than for the Republic of Korea to advance while leaving North Korea out as the worst economy on the globe. To this end, I intend to deal with state affairs from a creative and pragmatic perspective. This approach should of course extend to inter-Korean issues. If we are stuck in the past -- in terms of the pace of change, the way of doing business, and the way of thinking -- then we will not be able to open up a new era. Today is different than yesterday, and tomorrow will be much more different than today. Everything is continuously changing. Without change, we cannot survive. As you know, we live in an era when Republic of Korea, with its dearth of natural resources, must weather the high prices of resources, and when the ripple effects of the U.S. financial crisis are directly felt here in the Republic of Korea. If we are stuck in the past without changing in this fast-changing era, we will not survive. So we must change, and so must North Korea.

Against this backdrop, I call on the Ministry of Unification to work in this new Administration with self-initiated creativity and pragmatism. I know some believe that I am not interested in unification, and wonder why I attempted to scrap the Ministry of Unification. I don't think unification is more likely with the Ministry of Unification and unlikely otherwise. More than anyone else, I love the North Korean people. I hope the North Korean people will reach the level where every one of them can enjoy the minimum basic rights to human happiness. More than anybody else, I hope the last divided nation on earth will be unified. Already the Republic of Korea has attained the 20,000 dollar per capita income, and is looking forward to the 30,000 dollar level. But politicians' explanations are not enough to reach a consensus on the timing, method, and process for genuine unification. Nor should it be that way. We should pursue unification while respecting the will of the 70 million people of the combined Koreas. I am very positive about the South and North coming together and talking to each other. It is just that I will not do it the same way as in the past. Perhaps the new government might be even more proactive about inter-Korean issues.

Given the many circumstances surrounding North Korea, we should also seek ways to approach the North Korean defector issue from a humanitarian perspective. It is an issue we should consider with deep humanitarian consciousness and sympathy toward those defectors who have nowhere to go or nothing to eat.

I look forward to what will be a serious discussion of unification issues today. You (MOU officials) and I need to coordinate and share the way we look at North Korea and unification. When public officials come together around a cause, the Republic of Korea is sure to advance. But when they split, we can't even take one step forward. This change begins from the top. Leaders must first change, before demanding change from the people. First the President must change, then the Cabinet members should change, and then you should change. This will eventually bring about a real change in the nation. Thus, share your ideas, discuss and exchange views, work as proactive participants in the new government, and stand at the forefront to successfully improve South-North relations. As able and experienced officials, I am sure you can do anything, as long as your thinking is right. If you deal with inter-Korean relations in a fairer, more just manner, and with strong dedication, I am optimistic that everything will work out well.

End text of remarks.

13. (SBU) COMMENT: Excerpts from President Lee's remarks received prominent coverage in local and international print media as they indicate once again his harder line of thinking in dealing with the North. We were struck by the President's comments on his "love" for the North Korean people, which suggested a more personal connection to his fellow Koreans while avoiding mention of the DPRK regime. The remarks also dispelled concerns that economic ventures at Mt. Kumgang and

KIC might come to a halt, as was reported in Korean media in recent days. President Lee has yet to clearly answer key policy questions such as whether or not the South will provide food and fertilizer aid to the North, and how closely progress in the Six-Party talks will be linked to relations between the North and South,. But this nuanced statement leaves the door open for detailed interactions with the North.

STANTON